

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 3, 2019

The Honorable Thomas B. Modly
United States Acting Secretary of the Navy
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write regarding Retired Senior Chief Russell A. Dotson. In early November 2019, the *Chicago Sun Times* and *Detroit Free Press* published stories about the difficulty Retired Senior Chief Dotson and his family have experienced in trying to transfer G.I. Bill benefits he rightfully earned because of a bureaucratic paperwork failure.

Retired Senior Chief Dotson is from Flint, Michigan, and served honorably in the U.S. Navy for 22 years. In 2017, when choosing whether to retire or continue serving, Retired Senior Chief Dotson spoke to his Navy career counselor who informed him that he met all transferability requirements to maintain transfer eligibility of the G.I. Bill benefits that he earned to his daughter. Thus, reasonably relying on the advice the Navy provided him, Retired Senior Chief Dotson chose in good faith to retire.

In 2013, Retired Senior Chief Dotson was able to transfer his G.I. Bill benefits to his daughter, who later began her university studies at DePaul University in Chicago. However, at the end of his daughter's second quarter of her freshman year, the government stopped making payments for her tuition and housing. Further troubling, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs told Retired Senior Chief Dotson's daughter that she had to repay what already was paid under the transfer of G.I. benefits from her father—more than \$20,000, including interest. As a result, she is currently working three part-time jobs, in addition to getting loans, after being forced to transfer to an in-state school in Michigan to save money.

This entire chain of unfortunate events was caused because, despite the Navy's advice to Retired Senior Chief Dotson on his decision to retire, the Navy miscalculated his eligibility to maintain the transfer of his education benefits. The miscalculation—which was the Navy's mistake—was just six days of reserve duty (or 89 calendar days of the requirement to maintain transfer eligibility), after Retired Senior Chief Dotson served the United States for 22 years. Furthermore, Retired Senior Chief Dotson had ample amount of leave days (authorized absences) saved up to easily cover this time, but because of the Navy's miscalculation, he was unable to appropriately utilize them.

Retired Senior Chief Dotson did everything right. Yet now, because of the Navy's own bureaucratic failures, Retired Senior Chief Dotson's family is facing a precarious financial situation because they are unable to utilize the benefits he rightfully earned. As such, we ask that you immediately direct the Navy to allow Retired Senior Chief Dotson to transfer his G.I. Bill benefits to his daughter, as well as ensure his family is no longer responsible for the debt previously incurred. Both Retired Senior Chief Dotson and his daughter acted honorably and in good faith and they should not have to shoulder the burden for the Navy's bureaucratic failures. We will also note that Retired Senior Chief Dotson has done everything he can to address this error utilizing both his prior chain of command and the Bureau of Naval Records Corrections, to no avail.

It would appear to us that there is no doubt that Retired Senior Chief Dotson, given his decades of service to the United States, has earned the right to transfer his G.I. Bill benefits to his daughter. We urge you to immediately help rectify this bureaucratic failure.

Sincerely,



Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator



Andy Levin
Member of Congress



Gary C. Peters
U.S. Senator



Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress



Haley Stevens
Member of Congress



Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Mark T. Esper, United States Secretary of Defense
Mr. Robert Wilkie, United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs